

# THE PAMPAS OF ARGENTINA SEEN BY CLEMENCEAU

## Former Premier of France Tells of the Great Cattle-Raising Country of South America and Its People.

By Georges Clemenceau.

This is the eighth of a series of articles giving his impressions of South America written by the former Premier of France.

EVERY capital is a world in itself, a world in which national and foreign elements blend; but to understand the life of a nation one must go out into the country.

A vast territory, ten times the size of France, extending from Patagonia to Paraguay and Bolivia, will naturally offer the greatest diversity of soil and climate, shifting conditions of labor and existence of customs, and sometimes of morals, which will differ still more.

In restricted areas our ancient Europe still in the same way show ethnical groups with sufficiently marked features (such as may be seen in our French provinces) to withstand the events of a long history that has not been able even to destroy or even modify their characteristics.

It is quite another matter when on a continent with no history at all you get men of every origin spread over it, brought together by a community of interests and hope to fertilize its soil with the powerful alluvion of their labor.

I have already said what racial characteristics subsist. The colonist will of course at first do all he can to remain what the land of his birth has made him, the first evidence of this is his tendency to fall into groups and form national colonies. But the land of his adoption will in time surely force upon him the inevitable conditions of a new mode of life, the very necessity of adapting himself to changed conditions making of him a new creature, to be later definitely molded by success.

The pampas are not the Argentine. They form, however, so predominant a part that they have shaped the man and the race by imposing on them their organization of agriculture and labor and the exploitation of their natural resources.

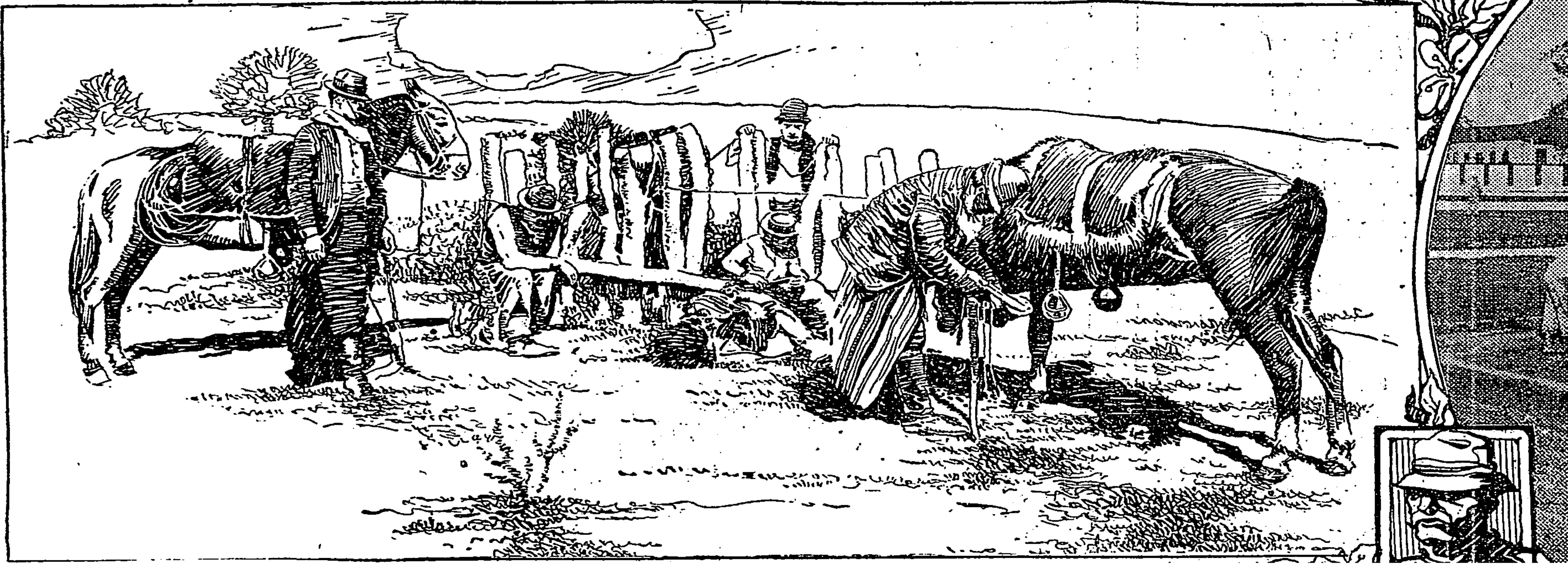
While manufacturers are still in a rudimentary state and are likely to remain so for a long time to come owing to the lack of coal, the pampas from the Andes to the ocean offer an immense plain of the same alluvial soil, from end to end, ready to respond in the same degree to the same effort of stock raising or agriculture. An identical stretch of unbroken ground, with identical surface, identical pools of subterranean water, no special features in any spot to call for other than the unchanging life of the campo.

Naturally the first experiments were made in the most rudimentary fashion on the half-wild herds of cattle that could not be improved unless the European market were thrown open.

As soon as this outlet was assured the whole effort of skill and money was directed toward the improvement of stock, and the progress made in a few years of work far exceeded the brightest hopes of those early days.

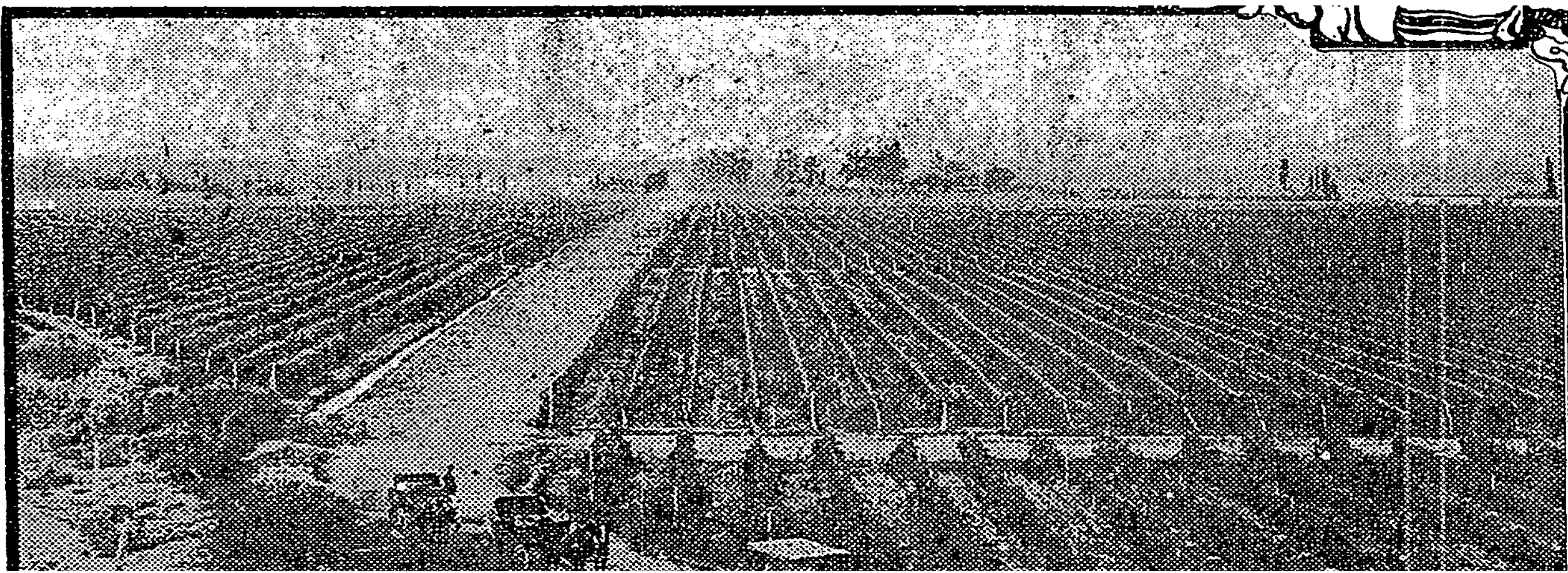
In the folds of the poncho, (a blanket with a hole in it for the head to pass through,) is incumbered with a whip whose handle, serves on occasion as a mallet, and a lasso, with or without metal balls, coiled behind his saddle. He makes a picturesque enough figure in the monotonous expanse of earth and sky, where rancho or tree, beast or man, stand out in high relief against a background of glaring light. Without sign or syllable, his eyes fixed on the empty horizon, the man passes through the silence of infinite solitude, rising from the nothingness of the horizon at one point to sink again into nothingness at another like a ghost. When riding in a troop they talk together in low tones. There are none of those out-

difficulties of the road. Here there are no police regulations to annoy the motorist. No other law but your own fancy and a certain thought for the savory lunch that is awaiting you at the next estancia. When you reach it you will discover that the monstrous herds on the horizon were merely these gentle creatures, placid in their happy ignorance of the fall designs that are the hidden causes of man's kindness to them. Do we astonish them? Or are they wholly indifferent? Their eyes are fixed on our panting machines as ours are on the grazing beasts, and not a spark is struck by the meeting of the two intelligences, the one so calmly definite, and the other too soon checked in its effort to understand. Obedient to the re-



bursts of fun you might expect in a land of sunshine, but a gravity born of men thus brought face to face with nature in the pitiless light of sky and earth where no fold or break in the surface arrests the glance or fixes the attention.

Still, there are those gigantic herds of horned cattle or horses which people a very appreciable portion of the melancholy plain—"green in Winter, yellow in Summer." I say nothing of the great flocks of sheep because there were none in districts which I visited. When you talk of a herd of ten thousand cows you make some impression on even a big farmer of the Charolais. Well, I can assure you that out in the pampas ten thousand head of cattle is a small affair. You see a dark shadow that rises on the horizon and might be either a village or a group of haystacks, until the vague shifting of the mass suggests to your mind the idea of some form of life. The lines show clearer, groups break off and stand

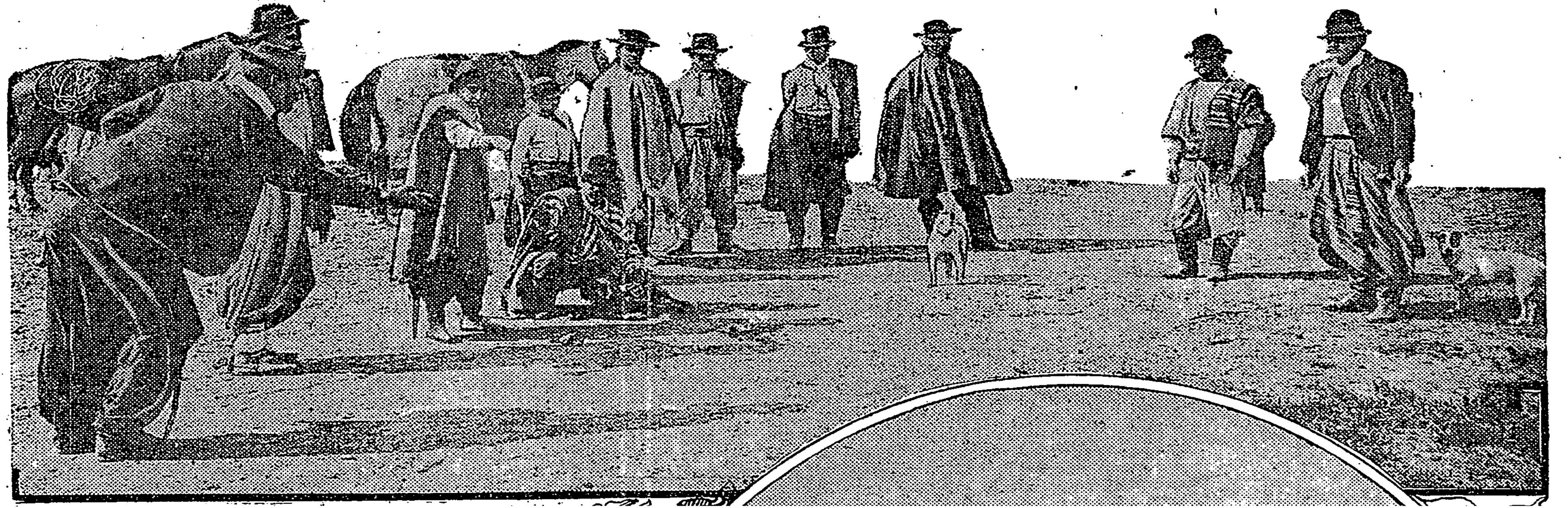


was by no means uncommon for the dogs to return to the farm from the campo bearing a horrible smell about them. For my part, if I was often revolted by the spectacle of putrefying carcasses lying about the pampas and seen either on my walks or from the railway train—some even lying festering in pools close to dwelling houses—I cannot say that my olfactory nerves were ever troubled. It is true we were then in the Winter, and it is the sun that has the most fearful power on decaying flesh. I occasionally spoke of the danger of poisonous fly bites, but I got only vague replies.

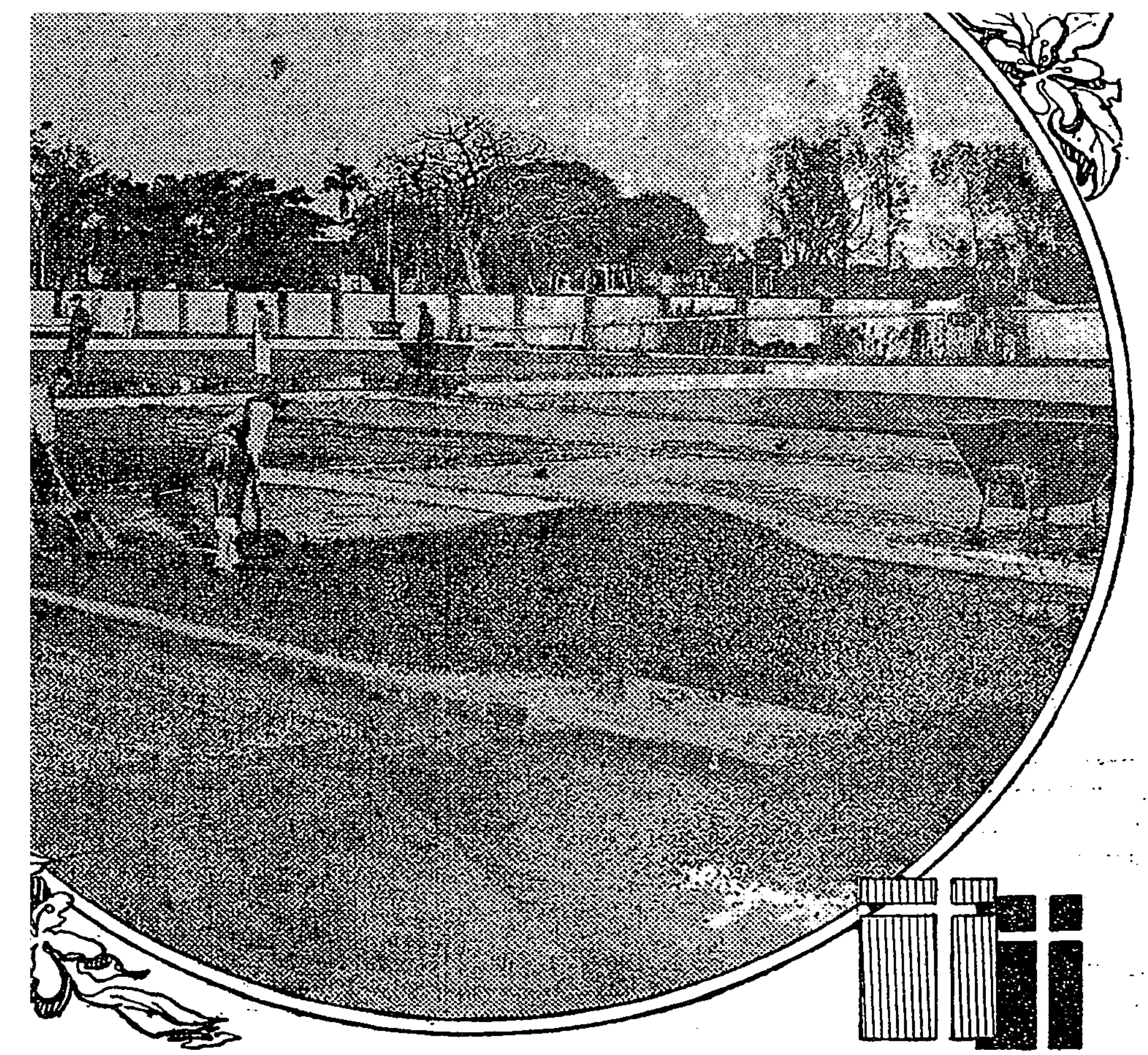
In my personal experience, whenever I met something disagreeable on my walks about the pampas, the carcass was invariably completely mummified, the skin being so thoroughly tanned that the object might have been carefully prepared for a museum of comparative anatomy. But when death was recent, and the Summer season had set in with its attendant flies, I should certainly avoid the neighborhood.

It will surprise no one to hear that I took the liberty of calling the attention of two or three statesmen to the dangers of this unfortunate custom and the deplorable impression it is bound to make on travelers. The reply was invariably that the Argentine was suffering, and would no doubt continue to suffer for some time to come, from a lack of hands and that the thousands of animals which under normal conditions perished in the pampas could never find grave diggers; when, therefore, a dry season killed off as many as ten thousand sheep on a single ranch, there was no resource but to bow to the inevitable.

We see that cattle rearing in the Argentine has its ups and downs. At every turn Nature intervenes with her elements of success and disaster. Man's role is to furnish a minimum of labor, and by the force of circumstances he is compelled to reckon on quantity for his modicum of success; but the fact does not prevent his successful efforts to improve the quality. As I have already said, he will give any price to secure a fine strain. It is to England that he is obliged to go for his stock, since that country is the principal market for his meat. On all hands I was told that the results were most satisfactory. As regards their breed of horses the results is manifest. But for cattle, I take the liberty of disagreeing with those who declare that the Argentine can send to our slaughter-houses at La Villlette meat as fine as our own at half its price. If, however, I am firmly convinced that our palates would not readily be satisfied with the frozen meat that seems to please the English, I am quite aware that there is a distinction to be drawn between the choice beasts, generally magnificent, that make such a show at exhibitions and the common run of the average flock among which truth compels me to admit there are some very indifferent animals. It will require a long time to equal the fine produce of our French strains, a change in the conditions of cattle rearing farms, for the Argentine ever to equal the product of our French breeders. It can never be otherwise as long as the young beast, bred somewhat at haphazard and born on the open campo between the corpses of some of its relatives, is left to grow up as best it can, exposed to every change of temperature. Everywhere I came upon young calves abandoned by their mothers as soon as born, and only sought out when the time for feeding came round; it cannot be said that the stock would bear comparison with the average produce of a Norman or



Natives of Argentina Playing Games.



A Coffee Plantation in South America.

and there spreads its triumphant arms near some rancho, probably called into being by the fact of its presence on the spot, and occasionally on the pastures of the campo it may be seen extending its shelter to some quadruped that shuns the rays of the sun. Around his estancia the farmer plants his orchard and his ornamental thickets, which flourish or not at the will of the bonanzas. After the passage of the destructive horse it requires at least two years for the country to recover. The eucalyptus, owing to its rapid growth, gives very good results, but the favorite tree in the pampas is the "paraliso," the "Tree of Paradise," which is admirable rather for its flower than its form and withstands to some extent the locusts through sheer perseverance. Occasionally one comes upon a small wood in which the "ornevo," the cardinal, sings and the dove coos.

For the campo has a whole population of running or flying creatures whose cardinal virtue is that of being satisfied with little in the shape of a shelter. The gardens and parks of the estancias provide a natural asylum for a world of winged songsters, in whom man, softened by isolation, has not yet inspired terror.

But the pampas in their nudity are not without signs of life. There is the gaucha, smaller than the llana, larger than the stork, which has already retreated far from Buenos Aires. The gray ostrich, formerly abundant, has been decimated by the lasso of the gaucha, who, at the risk of getting a kick that may rip him open, attacks the beast that struggles wildly with the bonanzas of the cruel road, dragging out his handsomest feathers and then lets him go. The really wild ostrich has disappeared from the pampas. Flocks of them may be seen from the window of the train, but they are all confined in fenced parks and are really in captivity. I cannot be expected to give a list of all the creatures that swarm on or under the soil of the campo. There is nothing to be said about the prairie dog, which has been systematically destroyed on account of the damage it does. I must mention the "tatu," a small creature with a pointed muzzle, something between a lizard and a tortoise, and with the shell of the latter. It makes holes similar to those of our burrowers. The gaucha considers its flesh excellent, declaring that it tastes like pork. Perhaps the surest way of getting the taste of pork is to address one's self to the pig himself, here popularly known as the "creole pig," a lovable little black beast that plays with the children in tiny muddy pools in the neighborhood of the ranchos.

Passing by the hare, (imported from Europe), the small partridge and the martinete, (timamou), to which I shall return presently, I may mention the plover (abundant) and the birds of carrion which settle all disputes for the possession of the ground according to the dictates of a boundless appetite, and the small owl, so tame that it rises every few yards with a cheerful cry, to come down again a few paces further on, following all your movements with a questioning eye. At the mouth of its burrow, or on the stake that marks the boundary of the rancho, its pretty form is a feature in the landscape. Finally, I must not forget the ornevo, to be found near the estancias and in the woods, a charming, tame little bird that chatters all the time, like a good many people, and builds a mud nest in the branches, in the shape of an oven, divided into two apartments, whose tiny doors open always to the north, whence comes the warmth. If you lose yourself in the forest you need no compass but this. The gauchos hold the bird in pious respect. Legend has it that he never works on Sundays at his nest. Here is one who wants no legislation for a "repos hebdomadaire" any more than he does for the regulation of the liquor sale. Oh, the superiority of our "inferior brothers"!

I heard a good deal about the great lakes in which thousands of black-necked swans and rose-pink flamingoes may be seen at play. I was never able to go and visit these, but some miller who was up for this, M. Onelli presented me with two handsome black-throated swans, which, however, were not able to stand the climate of Normandy.

Having thus sketched the principal features of the setting, it remains to fill in the picture of the rancho and estancia.

I have shown you the primitive cabin of the Robinson Crusoe of the campo. I have drawn a picture of the colonist and the gaucha; it is not necessary to go back to him again. I have shown the divers elements of his existence. The railway has not changed anything in it except by abolishing the interminable rides of earlier days, and the tiresome monotony of conveying freight wagons to the town markets. The railway, moreover, brings within reach of the rancho the conveniences of modern furnishings.

In the huts of the half-castes, near Tucuman, the only piece of furniture I saw was a pair of trestles on which was laid the mat which served as seat, bed, or table—the kitchen being always outside. In the pampas, dwellings that look modest and even less than modest, generally boast an easy chair, a chest of drawers, with a clock, a sewing machine, and gramophone, which, when fortune comes is completed by a piano. The gramophone is the theatre of the pampas. It brings with it orchestra, song, words, and the whole "art" paraphernalia suited to the aesthetic sense of its hearers. Thus, on all sides, dreadful nasal sounds twang out to the great joy of the youth of the colony, whose artistic career will probably end in a colonist's "fauteuil" (stall, also easy chair).

The morals of the campo are what the conditions of life there have made them. Men who are crowded together in large cities are exposed to many temptations. When too far removed from the restraint of public opinion the facility of abuse is no less dangerous. In all circumstances a witness acts as a curb. In the pampas as it used to be the witness, nine times out of ten, became an accomplice. Thus between the fear of a distant and vague police force and the ever-present fear of the Indian, the gaucha naturally became a soldier of fortune, prepared for any bold stroke. With his dagger in his belt, his gun on his shoulder, and the lasso on his saddle bow, he rode over the eternal prairie in search of adventures and ready at any moment for the drama that might be awaiting him. To his other qualities must be added a generous hospitality, that dispensed to all comers his more or less well-earned goods, and the question of courtesy was, in more remote circumstances that might serve at hand to put a body of adventurers in motion. You were on the side of Gen. X. or Gen. Z., according to the hopes of the party, and that was the least essential point. When the signal was once given, a military force had to be organized, and the means adopted were admirably simple. Any weapon that could be used in battle was picked up, and a band would present itself at the door of an estancia.

"We are for Gen. X. All the peons here must follow us. To arms! To horse!" And the order would be obeyed. Otherwise, the estancia and its herds would suffer. With such a system of recruiting, troops were quickly collected, and a few such visits would suffice to bring together a very respectable force of men. My friend Blessey, the artist, with whom I had the pleasure of making the journey, witnessed just such a scene one day at an estancia that he was visiting. He was chatting with the overseer when the man, hearing a suspicious sound, flung himself down and pressed his ear to the ground. A moment later he rose looking anxious.

"There are horsemen galloping this way. What can have happened?" And sure enough, a minute later, there appeared a band of men so orderly equipped that at first they were taken for magistrates. It was carnival time. The leader, however, came forward and called on the overseer to place all his peons at the service of the revolutionaries. Blessey himself only escaped by claiming the rights of a French citizen. And do not imagine the sentiment in their camp was by no means a respect for human life. On both sides these brave peons fought furiously, asking no questions about the party in whose cause they happened to

(Continued on page 12.)



# THE PAMPAS OF ARGENTINA AS SEEN BY CLEMENCEAU

(Continued from page 3.)

be enrolled. The overseer of a neighboring estancia, who was talking with M. Blesy when called to parley with the revolutionaries, was shot dead a few hours later for having offered resistance to them.

If men are thus unceremoniously enrolled—I use the present tense because one never knows what may happen—it may be imagined the horses are borrowed still more freely. A curious thing is that when the war is over and these creatures are again at liberty they find their way back to their own pastures quite easily by themselves.

The overseer of one estancia told me that the last revolution had cost him six hundred horses, of which four hundred, that had been taken a distance of from 200 to 300 kilometers, returned of their own accord. How they contrive to steer their course over the pampas with their inextricable tangle of wire fencing, I do not undertake to explain. I inquired of the overseer whether it were not possible to steal one of his horses without his noticing it:

"Oh," he said, "it is like picking an apple in Normandy! It often happens, no doubt that a traveler on a tired horse lassoes another to continue his journey. But on reaching his destination he seizes the animal at liberty and he invariably makes his way back to the herd."

I have already spoken of the time when the gaucho would fell an ox to obtain a steak for luncheon. In some of the more remote districts it is possible that the custom still subsists. But it is none the less true that a growing civilization, and a rapid instrument, are changing the gaucho together with his surroundings and his sphere of action. The gaucho on foot is very like any other man. His flowing necktie of brilliant color, once the

party signal, has been toned down. His poncho, admirably adapted to the climatic conditions of camp life in the campo, is now used by the townsmen, who throw it over their arm or shoulder according to the variations in the temperature. The sombrero, like the slashed breeches or high boots, is no longer distinctive. There remains only the heavy stirrup of romantic design, more or less artistically ornamented, but now often replaced by a simple ring or rope of iron. The days of roystering glamour are passed. The heavy roller of civilization levels all the elements of modern existence to make way for the utilitarian, but inaeesthetic triumph of uniformity. Yet a little longer and the life of the campo will be nothing but a memory, for with his picturesque former dress the former man himself is disappearing.

The modern gaucho has preserved from his predecessor the discretion in speech, the reserved manner and scrutinizing eye of the man who lives on the defensive. But from every pore he distils civilization, and he can stroll down Florida Street in Buenos Aires without attracting any attention. It is in vain that the theatre seeks to reproduce the life of the campo as I saw it attempted at the "Apollo." What

can it show us beyond the eternal comedy of love or the absurdities of the wife of the gaucho who has too suddenly made his fortune, and both subjects belong to all times and all countries in the same way as every dance and every song are common to any assembly of young humanity. Long before the gramophone was invented the guitar was the joy of Spanish ears to the furthest confines of the pampas. Between two outbreaks of civil war, when men were rushing madly to meet death, joyous songs and plaintive refrains alternated beneath the branches of the ombu, where the youth of the district met, and the sudden dramas of the rancho made them the more eager to drink deep of the pleasure they knew to be fleeting. They danced the "Pericou" and the "Tango," as they still do to-day, and the audacious gestures in which amorous Spain gave expression to the ardor of its feelings have now passed into the domain of history. The "Creole balls," where may be seen graceful young girls in soft white draperies, dancing in a chain that resembles our "Pastourelle," have been reproduced on postcards and are familiar to all. There are, there will ever be, in the pampas—at least I fondly hope so—graceful young girls dressed in white and destined to rouse the love instinct which never seems to sleep in an Italian or Spanish breast. But the very trouble we take to reconstitute on the stage for the edification of travelers from Europe the real Tango in all the antique effrontery of its ingenuousness, proves that the heroic age, made up of the naïf and the barbarous, is fast losing its last vestiges of character in the wilderness of chariot civilized monotony. The Tango is disappearing rapidly. On the other hand, at Rio de Janeiro, in the flower of my seventieth year, I actually figured in the official quadrille of the President of the Republic to the shame of French choregraphy. Alas! Alas!